

## Lesson Unit 8: Intentional Actions (*Kamma*) and Results

### Learning Outcomes:

At the completion of the lesson, students will be able to

- Explain the Buddhist concept of kamma with reference to the early discourses of the Buddha
- Explain the Buddhist emphasis that it is only from the deliberately performed actions that the doer could expect the desired results.
- Explain that Buddhism provides a causal account of kamma without siding it with either determinism or accidentalism.

Explain the positive character of the Buddhist theory of kamma for the law of kamma enables an understanding person to make this life as well as next lives happy and prosperous.

### Student Activities:

- Read each of the Readings/notes carefully and underline/ highlight the key words and concepts.
- Also go through the slides of the PowerPoint presentation.
- Draw a mind-map around the main topic linking the key words and concepts that you underlined or highlighted in the readings showing their relationship to the main topic and also to each other
- Listen to the YouTube presentation on kamma and write down your comments in a paragraph
- Read the quoted passages and be familiar with the textual explanations on kamma

For your journal entries, write detailed accounts on the following: Volitional acts, determinism, vipaka (result), meritorious action, three evil roots (greed, hatred, and delusion), types of kamma

## Reading

### Intention (*cetanā*)

Action is really mental. All moral conduct springs from the inner will of the individual. Therefore, only the volitional act (*sañcetanikaṃ kammaṃ*) is ethically significant. As such, the moral quality of an act depends on the intention behind it, and the intensity of the act depends on the extent to which it is performed deliberately (*sañcicca*). "It is intention that I call kammic action" (*cetanāhaṃ kammaṃ vadāmi*), says the Buddha (AN III, 415). Intention can only be either virtuous or wicked. A morally good act purifies the state of mind. Hence such acts are called purifying or meritorious acts (*puñña-kamma*). A morally bad action defiles the state of mind; hence such acts are called sinful acts (*pāpa-kamma*).

### Causal Account

Buddha gave a causal account of kammic acts. Behavior of man is determined by one of three factors: external stimuli, conscious motives, and unconscious motives. As a discourse has it, contact could be the cause of behavior (AN III, 415: *phasso kammānaṃ nidāna-sambhavo*). An innocent little baby lying on its back, if it happens to touch a live ember, quickly draws back its hand or foot. Such behavior is unmotivated (*asañcetanika/ acetanika*) and is purely caused by physical stimulation. Therefore, the individual is not responsible for the behavior caused by physical stimulation. Conscious motives are greed (*moha*), hate (*dosa*), and confusion (*moha*). The motives of greed, hate, and delusion produce evil behavior. Morally good behavior is motivated

by the absence of greed (*alobha*), hate (*adosa*) and delusion (*amoha*). Hence, the doer is held responsible for behavior determined by them. Unconscious motives too influence behavior. Unconscious motives are the desire to perpetuate life (*jīvitukāma*), the desire to avoid death (*amaritukāma*), the desire for pleasure (*sukhakāma*), and the aversion to pain (*dukkhapatikkūla*). These motives, though unconscious, result from mistaken understanding of the nature of existence. Therefore, the doer could be held responsible for behavior determined by them.

## Action and Results

Whatever one does by that action one becomes (MN I, 390: *yaṃ karoti tena upapajjati ... kamma-dāyādā sattā*). As the man sows, so he reaps; beings are inheritors of their kammic actions. Beings are responsible for their deeds and are heirs to their deeds, having deeds for matrix, deeds for kin and deeds for refuge; whatsoever deed they do, be it good or evil, they become its heir. One with divine eye, an extra-sensory knowledge developed by meditators, knows beings fairing according to their kammic actions (MN I, 82: *yathā kammūpage satte pajānāti*). As a discourse has it, the world revolves by kammic action; the mankind too revolves by kammic action; like the nail holding the rolling chariot-wheel, beings are held by kammic action.

## Results are Conditional

Human behavior is conditioned by causes; that behavior is followed by correlated consequences (*vipāka/phala*). The doctrine of kamma is this correlation between action (*kamma*) and consequence (*phala/ vipāka*). Depending on the nature of kammic action and the circumstances in which it is committed, there would be appropriate consequences. This is the view of the Buddha. Therefore, the experiencing of the result of an action is conditional upon the action and various other factors. The Buddha rejects the complete determinism between kammic action and consequence; hence, he rejects the statement: "Just as a man does a deed, so does he experience its consequences" (AN I, 249). In such circumstance, according to the Buddha, the religious life would be rendered meaningless. There would be no opportunity for the complete destruction of suffering. Instead, Buddha, with regard to the kammic action and its consequences, the Buddha declares: "Just as a man does a deed whose consequences would be experienced in a certain way (*yathāvedaniyaṃ*), so does he experiences its consequences (*assa vipākam*)." If the view is such, the religious life is rendered meaningful. There will be an opportunity for complete destruction of suffering. Recognition of circumstances in which the action is committed et cetera makes the effect conditional upon such circumstances.

Deeds will generate consequences, but these consequences are not the same all the time. There are various other conditions that can interfere in the determination of the relationship between deed and consequence. Utilizing the simile of two equal grains of salt (*loṇa*), one of which is thrown into a cup full of water and the other into the river Ganges, the Buddha illustrates the conditionality of the relationship between kammic action and the result. "If a man were to throw a grain of salt into a small cup filled with water, the water in the cup becomes salty and undrinkable because of that grain of salt." "If a man were to throw a similar grain of salt into the river Ganges, because of the great mass of water therein, the water would not become salty and undrinkable." Similarly, some trifling evil deed committed by someone may lead him to hell. But similar trifling evil deed committed by another may bring consequences experienced in this very life, consequences that may be barely noticeable. Two people committing identical or similar evil deeds reap different consequences in different ways. Reason is that the circumstances, factors surrounding the actions, are very different. Hence, the Mahākammavibhaṅga-sutta introduces four kinds of persons (MN II, 207-215): One who has performed evil deeds and is reborn in an evil state, in hell. One who has performed evil deeds and is reborn in a good state, in heaven. One who has performed good deeds and is reborn in a good state, in heaven. One

who has performed good deeds and is reborn in an evil state, in hell. "A certain person has not properly cultivated his body, behavior, thought, and intelligence; he is inferior and insignificant and his life is short and miserable; of such a person even a trifling evil deed done leads him to hell." In the case of someone who has proper culture of the body, behavior, thought and intelligence, who is superior and not insignificant, and who is endowed with long life, the consequences of a similar evil deed are to be experienced in this very life, and sometimes may not appear at all." Therefore, the effect of a deed is not determined solely by the deed itself. It is determined by many other factors, such as the nature of the person who commits the deed, the circumstances in which it is committed. The effect of certain actions may sometimes be so insignificant that they are not even perceived; sometimes the consequences may be experienced in this very life, and sometimes in a future existence.

## **One Can Change the Direction of One's Life**

The Mahāmaṅgalasutta presents three factors that could be considered auspicious in the life of the man who want to reap good fortunes: merit acquired in the past, life in appropriate surroundings, and proper resolve or application. The last factor informs us the importance of energetic application, performing actions in this very life for the discovery of one's good fortunes. The Kammavibhaṅgasutta states that it is possible for an evil-doer to be reborn in a happy existence, provided he attempts to change his personality right now. It is this possibility of changing one's personality that gives meaning to moral or religious life. According to the Buddha, kammic action is one of the contributing factors in the evolution of the human personality.

## **Notes for Reflection**

### **Intention (*cetanā*):**

The word *cetanā* (*citta* in action) has been translated as:

- inner will
- volition
- intention
- deliberation

### **Intention is Kamma**

- "It is intention (*cetanā*) that I call kamma" (AN III, 415)
- The intensity of the act depends on the extent to which it is performed deliberately (*sañcicca*).
- The moral quality of an act lies in the intention behind it.
- Only volitional acts (*sañcetanika-kamma*) are ethically significant.
- Intention is the spring of all moral conduct .
- Intention can only be virtuous or wicked.

Doing a good act is actually purifying one's state of mind. It is a *puñña-kamma*.

### **Buddha gave a causal account of kamma.**

- Contact is the cause of behavior (*phasso kammānam nidāna-sambhavo*)

## Behavior of man is either intentional or unintentional

### Unintentional

- A little baby lying on its back quickly draws back its hand or foot if it happens to touch a live ember.
- This behavior of the baby is unmotivated (*asañcetanika/ acetanika*), and is caused by purely his body-consciousness.

The individual is not responsible for his/her unintentional behavior.

### Intentional

- Intentional acts are those motivated by greed (*moha*), hate (*dosa*), and confusion (*moha*) or their opposites.
- The motives of greed, hate, and delusion produce evil behavior.
- Morally good behavior is motivated by non-greed (*alobha*), non-hate (*adosa*) and non-delusion (*amoha*).

The individual is held responsible for behavior determined by them.

### Tendencies (*anusaya*)

- The desire to perpetuate life, desire to avoid death, desire for pleasure, and the aversion to pain are human tendencies.
- These tendencies are due to mistaken understanding of the nature of existence.

The individual may be held responsible for behavior determined by such tendencies.

### Action and Results

- "Whatever one does by it s/he arises" (*yam karoti tena upapajjati ... kamma-dāyādā sattā* -MN I, 390).
- "As the man sows, so he reaps; beings are inheritors of their kamma."

"One with divine eye knows beings fairing according to their kamma." (MN I, 82)

"By action revolves the world, by action revolves mankind; Like the nail holding the rolling chariot-wheel, beings are held by action."

"Beings are responsible for their actions, are heirs to actions, having actions for matrix, actions for kin, actions for refuge; whatsoever action they do, be it good or evil, they become its heir."

- Human behavior is conditioned by causes; That behavior is followed by correlated consequences (*vipāka/phala*)
- The doctrine of kamma is this correlation between action (*kamma*) and consequence (*phala/ vipāka*).
- Dependent upon the nature of kamma and the circumstances in which it is committed, there would be appropriate consequences.

Buddha denies (AN I, 249) the view: "Just as a man does a deed, so does he experience its consequences." (Complete determinism between action and result).

If it is the case, religious life is meaningless; for there is no opportunity for the complete destruction of suffering.

### Buddha's position:

**"Just as a man does a deed whose consequences would be experienced in a certain way (*yathāvedaniyam*), so does he experiences its consequences (*assa vipākam*)."**

If this is the case, religious life is meaningful.

There will be an opportunity for complete destruction of suffering.

**Recognition of circumstances in which the action is committed etc**, makes the effect conditional upon such circumstances.

Actions will generate results, but these **results are not the same all the time**.

There are **various other conditions** that can interfere in the determination of the relationship between action and result.

The Buddha illustrated the conditionality of the relationship by two similes.

- ❖ "If a man throws a grain of salt into a small cup filled with water, the water in the cup becomes salty and undrinkable because of that grain of salt."
- ❖ "If a man were to throw a similar grain of salt into the river Ganges, because of the great mass of water therein the water would not become salty and undrinkable."

Similarly, some trifling evil deed committed by one person may lead him to hell.

But similar trifling evil deed committed by another person may bring consequences experienced in this very life, consequences that may be barely noticeable.

Two people committing identical/similar evil deeds reaping different consequences in different ways.

Reason is that the circumstances/ factors surrounding the actions are very different.

### **Four kinds of persons:**

- One who has performed evil deeds and is reborn in an evil state, in hell.
- One who has performed evil deeds and is reborn in a good state, in heaven.
- One who has performed good deeds and is reborn in a good state, in heaven.
- One who has performed good deeds and is reborn in an evil state, in hell. MN II, 2007-215

"A certain person has **not properly cultivated** his body, behavior, thought, and intelligence; he is **inferior and insignificant** and his **life is short and miserable**; of such a person **even a trifling evil deed done leads him to hell**."

In the case of a person who **has proper culture** of the body, behavior, thought and intelligence, who **is superior and not insignificant**, and who is **endowed with long life**, the **consequences of a similar evil deed are to be experienced in this very life**, and sometimes may not appear at all."

**The effect of a deed is not determined solely by the deed itself.** It is determined by many other factors, such as the nature of the person who commits the deed, the circumstances in which it is committed.

The effect of certain actions may sometimes be so insignificant that they are not even perceived; sometimes the consequences may be experienced in this very life, and sometimes in a future existence.

### **Karma is one of causal processes**

Three factors that could be considered auspicious in the life of the man, determining consequences:

- merit acquired in the past;
- life in appropriate surroundings;

**proper resolve or application.**

- It is possible for an evil-doer to be reborn in a happy existence, provided he attempts to change his personality right now.

It is this possibility of changing one's personality that gives meaning to moral or religious life.

- Kamma is one of the contributing factors in the evolution of the human personality:

**"Action** is the field, **consciousness** the seed, and **craving** the moisture which lead to the **rebirth of a being**."

(A I, 223)

- Buddhism **denies the identity** but **accept the continuity**:
  - No Permanent, immutable, immortal soul = denial of identity does not imply denial of continuity

Constantly changing process; The doctrines of impermanence, causation and continuity are consistent and harmonious

**The human personality and Karma**

- The human personality is conditioned and provided with an identity by the **dispositions**
- Human society, its culture and civilization are all dominated by the **dispositions**.

When human dispositions dominate the human individual as well as the human society, we have kamma functioning at the level of both the individual and the society.

**We make our world.**

- My intention and our collective intentions

Our bodily, verbal and mental actions make the world of our experience.

## Readings from the Original Sources

### Action and Volition

S II 64-5

"Bhikkhus, **this body** is not yours, nor does it belong to others. It **is old kamma, to be seen as generated and fashioned by volition, as something to be felt** (*nāyaṃ bhikkhave kāyo tumhākaṃ na pi aññesaṃ Purāṇaṃ idam bhikkhave kammaṃ abhisankhataṃ abhisāñcetaṃ vedaniyaṃ (v.l. vedayitaṃ) datṭhabbaṃ*).

Therein, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple attends carefully and closely to **dependent co-Arising** itself thus: **'When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.'**

This is, with ignorance as condition, volitional formations [come to be], with volitional formations as condition, consciousness ... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of volitional formations, cessation of consciousness ... such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

Volition and Tendency become Support for Consciousness

S II, 65 -67 (three short Suttas put together)

"Bhikkhus, what one intends, and what one plans, and whatever one has a tendency towards: this becomes a basis for the maintenance of consciousness. When there is a basis there is a support for the establishing of consciousness.

(1) When consciousness is established and has come to growth, there is the production of future renewed existence. When there is the production of future renewed existence, future birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

(2) When consciousness is established and has come to growth, there is a descent of name-and-form. With name-and-form as condition, the six sense bases [come to be]; with the six sense bases as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling ... craving ... clinging ... existence ... birth; with birth as condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

(3) When consciousness is established and has come to growth, there is inclination. When there is inclination, there is coming and going. When there is coming and going, there is passing away and being reborn. When there is passing away and being reborn, future birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

If, bhikkhus, one does not intend, and one does not plan, **but one still has a tendency towards something**, this becomes a basis for the maintenance of consciousness. When there is a basis, there is a support for the establishing of consciousness. (1) When consciousness is established and has come to growth, there is the production of future renewed existence. When there is the production of future renewed existence, future birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

(2) When consciousness is established and has come to growth, there is a descent of name-and-form. With name-and-form as condition, the six sense bases [come to be]; with the six sense bases as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling ... craving ... clinging ... existence ... birth; with birth as condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

(3) When consciousness is established and has come to growth, there is inclination. When there is inclination, there is coming and going. When there is coming and going, there is passing away and being reborn. When there is passing away and being reborn, future birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

But, bhikkhus, when one does not intend, and one does not plan, and one does not have a tendency towards anything, no basis exists for the maintenance of consciousness. When there is no basis, there is no support for the establishing of consciousness. (1) When consciousness is

unestablished and does not come to growth, there is no production of future renewed consciousness. When there is no production of future renewed existence, future birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

(2) When consciousness is unestablished and does not come to growth, there is no descent of name-and-form. With the cessation of name and form comes cessation of the six-sense bases ... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

(3) When consciousness is unestablished and does not come to growth, there is no inclination. When there is no inclination, there is no coming and going. When there is no coming and going, there is no passing away and being reborn. When there is no passing away and being reborn, future birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

### Further Quotations from the Discourses:

"Bhikkhus, know kamma, know the cause of kamma, know the variations of kamma, know the results of kamma, know the cessation of kamma and know the way leading to the cessation of kamma ... Bhikkhus, intention, I say, is kamma. A person intends before acting through body, speech or mind. What is the cause of kamma? Sense contact is the cause of kamma. What are the variations of kamma? They are, the kamma which results in birth in hell, the kamma which results in birth in the animal world, the kamma which results in birth in the realm of hungry ghosts, the kamma which results in birth in the human realm, and the kamma which results in birth in the heaven realms. These are known as the variations of kamma. What are the results of kamma? I teach three kinds of kamma-result. They are, results in the present time, results in the next life, or results in a future life. These I call the results of kamma. What is the cessation of kamma? With the cessation of contact, kamma ceases. This very Noble Eightfold Path is the way leading to the cessation of kamma. That is, Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right concentration." (A III 415)

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"Bhikkhus, when a noble disciple thus clearly understands kamma, the cause of kamma, the variations of kamma, the results of kamma, the cessation of kamma and the way leading to the cessation of kamma, he then clearly knows the Higher Life comprising keen wisdom, which is the cessation of this kamma." (A III 415)

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"Bhikkhus, I will expound new kamma, old kamma, the cessation of kamma and the way leading to the cessation of kamma ... What is old kamma? Eye ... ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind should be understood as old kamma, these being formed from conditions, born of volition, and the base of feeling. This is called 'old kamma.'

"Bhikkhus, what is 'new kamma'? Actions created through body, speech and mind in the present moment, these are called 'new kamma.'

"Bhikkhus, what is the cessation of kamma? The experience of liberation arising from the cessation of bodily kamma, verbal kamma and mental kamma, is called the cessation of kamma.



"Bhikkhus, what is the way leading to the cessation of kamma? This is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, Right View ... Right Concentration. This is called the way leading to the cessation of kamma." (S III 132)

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"Bhikkhus, this body does not belong to you, nor does it belong to another. You should see it as old kamma, formed by conditions, born of volition, a base of feeling." (S II 64)

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"Bhikkhus, these three kamma-origins, greed, hatred and delusion, are causes of kamma. Whatever kamma is performed on account of greed, is born from greed, has greed as origin, and is formed from greed, results in rebirth. Wherever his kamma ripens, there the doer must experience the fruits of his kamma, be it in the present life, in the next life or in a future life. Kamma performed on account of hatred ... kamma performed on account of delusion ... (the same as for greed)

"Bhikkhus, these three kamma-origins, non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, are causes of kamma. Whatever kamma is performed on account of non-greed, is born from non-greed, has non-greed as origin, and is formed from non-greed, is devoid of greed, that kamma is given up, cut off at the root, made like a palm tree stump, completely cut off with no possibility of arising again. Whatever kamma is performed on account of non-hatred ... on account of non-delusion ..." (A I 134)

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"Bhikkhus, these three kamma-origins, greed, hatred and delusion, are causes of kamma. Whatever kamma is performed on account of greed, is born from greed, has greed as origin, is formed from greed, that kamma is unskillful ... is harmful ... has suffering as a result. That kamma exists for the arising of more kamma, not for the cessation of kamma. Whatever kamma is done on account of hatred ... on account of delusion ...

"Bhikkhus, these three kamma-origins, non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, are causes of kamma. Whatever kamma is done on account of non-greed, is born of non-greed, has non-greed as origin, is formed from non-greed, that kamma is skillful ... not harmful ... has happiness as a result. That kamma leads to the cessation of kamma, not to the arising of kamma. Whatever kamma is done on account of non-hatred ... on account of non-delusion ..." (A I 263)

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"Bhikkhus, killing of living beings, I say, is of three kinds. That is, with greed as motive, with hatred as motive and with delusion as motive. Stealing ... sexual misconduct ... lying ... malicious tale-bearing ... abusive speech ... frivolous speech ... covetousness ... resentment ... wrong view, I say, are of three kinds. They are, with greed as motive, with hatred as motive and with delusion as motive. Thus, greed is a cause for kamma, hatred is a cause for kamma, delusion is a cause for kamma. With the cessation of greed, there is the cessation of a cause of

kamma. With the cessation of hatred, there is the cessation of a cause of kamma. With the cessation of delusion, there is the cessation of a cause of kamma." (A V 261)

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"Bhikkhus, there are these four kinds of kamma ... What is black kamma, black result? Some people in this world are given to killing, given to stealing, given to sexual infidelity, given to lying, given to drinking intoxicants which lead to heedlessness. This is called black kamma, black result.

"Bhikkhus, what is white kamma, white result? Some people in this world dwell aloof from killing, aloof from stealing, aloof from sexual infidelity, aloof from lying, aloof from the drinking of intoxicants which lead to heedlessness. This is called white kamma, white result.

"Bhikkhus, what is kamma both black and white with result both black and white? Some people in this world create actions through body ... speech ... mind which are both harmful and not harmful. This is called 'kamma both black and white with result both black and white.'

"Bhikkhus, what is kamma neither black nor white, with result neither black nor white, which leads to the cessation of kamma? Within those three kinds of kamma, the intention to abandon (those kinds of kamma), this is called the kamma which is neither black nor white, with result neither black nor white, which leads to the ending of kamma." (A II 233)

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"Listen, Udayi. A bhikkhu in this Teaching and Discipline cultivates the Mindfulness Enlightenment Factor ... the Equanimity Enlightenment Factor, which tend to seclusion, tend to dispassion, tend to cessation, which are well developed, which are boundless, void of irritation. Having cultivated the Mindfulness Enlightenment Factor ... the Equanimity Enlightenment Factor ... craving is discarded. With the discarding of craving, kamma is discarded. With the discarding of kamma, suffering is discarded. Thus, with the ending of craving there is the ending of kamma; with the ending of kamma there is the ending of suffering." (S V 86)

Listen and watch on the concept of Kamma

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlqZUhohaOc>